



GREATER NEW ORLEANS
**FAIR HOUSING
ACTION CENTER**

April 25, 2019

Via E-Mail

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Dear Councilmembers:

The Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center appreciates your deferral of the hearing on proposed ordinance No. 32,626 and encourages you to continue seeking holistic solutions to the problem of homelessness in our city.

New Orleans certainly isn't the first city to attempt to address homeless encampments. However, the Council would be well-advised to learn from the past experiences of other municipalities that have faced legal challenges and costly litigation after passage of discriminatory ordinances that penalize poverty and homelessness.

Despite the stated objective to promote public health and safety, the proposed ordinance does not offer solutions designed to address homelessness itself. As an organization providing direct services to persons who have faced housing discrimination, GNO Fair Housing has represented several clients who were made homeless as the result of unlawful, discriminatory evictions. For persons in that situation, the potentially increased displacements envisioned by the proposed ordinance run the risk of further compounding the injustice they suffered, as well as subjecting them to the trauma of an additional eviction. Additionally, the loss of one's home and belongings would almost certainly create another barrier to finding permanent housing.

The affordable housing crisis in New Orleans is acute. Approximately 60% of the city's renters pay more than 1/3 of their monthly income toward housing costs, therefore meeting the U.S. government's definition of "cost-burdened." To further compound the affordable housing crisis by targeting vulnerable residents is counter-productive to the idea of an open and inclusive city.

Not only is providing equal access to housing opportunity a laudable goal, it is a requirement under federal fair housing laws. The sections of the ordinance that would permanently shuffle and displace homeless residents may directly contradict the City's duty to affirmatively further fair housing.

Experts and service providers, including the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, and the National Health Care for the Homeless Council, have published helpful resources around best practices for addressing homeless encampments. GNO Fair Housing urges the Council to draw upon those best practices, in conjunction with significant stakeholder engagement efforts, to craft a more just and equitable solution to the issue at hand.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "C. Hill", with a stylized, cursive script.

Cashauna Hill
Executive Director
Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center